

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: EDGAR FAURE AND THE NOUVEAU CONTRAT SOCIAL

1. SUMMARY: LE NOUVEAU CONTRAT SOCIAL (NCS), AN
INFORMAL ASSOCIATION OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AND OTHER
PROMINENT CITIZENS HEADED BY EDGAR FAURE, HELD ITS
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SIXTH CONFERENCE 15-16 OCTOBER IN EPERNAY WHOSE MAYOR

IS BERNARD STASI, A FORMER MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS TERRITORIES. SPEECHES BY CHIRAC AND BARRE ENHANCED THE ATTENTION THE NCS RECEIVED FROM THE MEDIA. BARRE INDICATED THAT NO ONE SHOULD FEAR ELECTION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE SINCE IT WILL BALANCE EEC INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN VIEW OF EXISTENCE OF EUROPEAN COUNCIL. HE CAUTIONED AGAINST ALLOWING THIS ISSUE BECOMING CAUGHT UP IN INTERNAL FRENCH POLITICS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE NCS WAS CONCEIVED BY FAURE AS A GROUP OF NON-IDEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND RESEARCH ON FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN WHICH PEOPLE OF VARIOUS POLITICAL BELIEFS WOULD FIND IT POSSIBLE TO PARTICIPATE, IN THE INTEREST OF SEEKING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO CONCRETE PROBLEMS. FAURE HAS SUCCEEDED IN ATTRACTING REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT WINGS OF THE MAJORITY, ESPECIALLY UDR, BUT HE HAS SO FAR FAILED DESPITE HIS TIRELESS EFFORTS TO ATTRACT ANYONE FROM THE OPPOSITION WITH OCCASIONAL EXCEPTIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC WORLD. THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS WERE ALSO ABSENT IN EPERNAY HAVING APPARENTLY JOINTLY DECIDED TO DECLINE FAURE'S INVITATIONS.

3. ALTHOUGH THE SUBSTANTIVE RESULTS OF THE NCS STUDIES AT LEAST UNTIL EPERNAY WERE LIMITED, THE NCS HAS SERVED FAURE WELL. IT PROVIDED AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, A CHALLENGE FOR HIS AGILE MIND AND A PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO KEEP HIS NAME IN THE MEDIA AND HIS HANDS IN THE POLITICAL PIE MIX.

4. BY USING HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND TALENT FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND SINCE 1974 THE PRESTIGE OF HIS OFFICE AS PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, FAURE HAS BEEN ABLE TO ATTRACT TO THE NCS CONFERENCES, HELD EVERY YEAR OR SO IN A DIFFERENT CITY, THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE MOMENT. IT WAS RAYMOND BARRE'S TURN THIS TIME TO BE PROCLAIMED BY FAURE AS "BASICALLY ONE OF US" SINCE, AS HIS PREDECESSORS HAD DONE BEFORE, BARRE FOUND HIMSELF IN AGREEMENT WITH FAURE'S EFFORT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO SEEK INSPIRATION FROM JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS ON WHICH THERE WAS A CONSENSUS.

5. THE EPERNAY CONFERENCE WAS NOTEWORTHY IN SEVERAL RESPECTS:

(A) IN CONTRAST TO ITS PREDECESSORS (1975-POITIERS,

1974-BEAUNE, 1973-BOULOGNE), WHERE THE DISCUSSIONS
RETAINED A PHILOSOPHICAL TONE AND CONTENT, IN EPERNAY
THERE WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF NCS ABILITY TO PRESENT
PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN.
IN FACT, SOME OF THE NCS SOLUTIONS TOOK THE HIGHEST
FORM OF SPECIFICITY OF BEING PRESENTED IN THE FORM OF
DRAFT PIECES OF LEGISLATION.

(B) THE ISSUES DISCUSSED INCLUDED YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT,
PROTECTION OF SAVINGS AGAINST INFLATION, DEVELOPMENT
OF RURAL AREAS, FINANCING OF SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS,
AND MODERN BIOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE-FRANCE AND
SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS. THE NEW IDEA CONCERNING THE
RURAL AREAS WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE THE

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SAME ASSISTANCE TO NON-AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS IN THE
RURAL AREAS AS IT DOES TO AGRICULTURE. THE PREPARATION
OF A DRAFT LAW ON THIS ISSUE RAISED THE PERENNIAL
QUESTION OF PARLIAMENT'S ABILITY TO PRESENT DRAFT
LEGISLATION WHICH UNDER THE FIFTH REPUBLIC ONLY THE
GOVERNMENT CAN DO. FAURE CAN BE COUNTED UPON TO FIND
WAYS TO BRING HIS DRAFT LEGISLATION TO THE FLOOR OF
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THE ASSEMBLY.

(C) THE APPEARANCE OF FORMER PM JACQUES CHIRAC, WHICH
HAD BEEN SCHEDULED BEFORE HIS RESIGNATION, CREATED
MOMENTS OF ANTICIPATION IN EPERNAY. CHIRAC, HOWEVER,
LET DOWN THOSE IN NCS WHO IN ADDITION TO THE
JOURNALISTS HAD EXPECTED HIM TO CONTINUE PRODUCING
FRONT-PAGE STATEMENTS AS HE HAD DONE RECENTLY WITH HIS
ADVOCACY, FIRST OF A WORKING CLASS PHILOSOPHY AND THEN
OF A CULTURAL REVOLUTION FOR THE UDR. THE QUESTION
WAS ASKED WHY THEN DID CHIRAC GO TO EPERNAY. THE
ANSWER GIVEN BY MOST OBSERVERS WAS THAT CHIRAC WAS
RECIPROCATING THE FRIENDSHIP FAURE HAD SHOWN HIM ALL
ALONG AND, SECOND, AN APPEARANCE IN NCS WAS IN LINE
WITH CHIRAC'S BROAD EFFORT TO SHAKE THE IMAGE HE
HAS ACQUIRED AS A LEADER OF THE RIGHT.

(D) IN LINE WITH THIS CHIRAC USED THE NCS FORUM TO
RETURN TO THE GAULLIST THEME OF WORKER PARTICIPATION,
NOT HESITATING TO CONNECT THIS CONCEPT TO THE EXERCISE
OF MANAGERIAL AUTHORITY AND THE SHARING OF CAPITAL
THROUGH STOCK OPTIONS.

(E) THE SUMMING UP OF THE CONFERENCE OFFERED FAURE
AN OPPORTUNITY TO IDENTIFY AND COMMENT ON WHAT HE
SAID WERE THE TWO MAJOR ISSUES THAT SHOULD CONCERN
THE FRENCH LEADERSHIP AND PEOPLE, I.E., INFLATION AND
THE ELECTION OF A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. FAURE ARGUED
WITH HIS CHARACTERISTIC BRIO AND FELICITOUS TURN OF
PHRASE THAT IT IS WRONG TO TREAT THESE TWO QUESTIONS
SEPARATELY BECAUSE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS
OF INFLATION IS THE MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES WHOSE
ACTIVITIES CAN BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL ONLY BY

INTERNATIONAL ACTION. HENCE, THE NEED FOR A UNITED EUROPE WHICH WOULD INCLUDE A POPULARLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

(F) AFTER ALLUDING TO THE OBJECTIONS THE ELECTION OF SUCH A PARLIAMENT HAS PROVOKED, FAURE WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SHOULD HAVE NO COMPETENCE ON MATTERS OF FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENSE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND SHOULD INSTEAD BE CHARGED WITH THE FUNCTION OF SECURING THE "ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE OF EUROPE." AS HE SAID SUBSEQUENTLY TO A SMALL GROUP OF FRIENDS AND TO THE REPORTING OFFICER, FAURE DELIBERATELY THREW OUT THIS LINE OF ARGUMENT IN THE EXPECTATION THAT BARRE WOULD GRAB IT AS A CLEVER AND PERSUASIVE WAY OF COUNTERING THE DEBRE TYPE OPPOSITION TO THE ELECTION OF A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

(G) BARRE DID NOT OBLIGE, HOWEVER, BECAUSE, AS HE SAID, HE DID NOT SHARE FAURE'S PREMISE REGARDING THE MNC ROLE BEHIND THE INFLATION. AFTER POINTING OUT THAT THOSE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION HAVE MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES ON THEIR TERRITORIES, HE CAUTIONED AGAINST ALLOWING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO BE CAUGHT UP IN INTERNAL POLITICS. HE HIGHLIGHTED FRANCE'S ROLE IN PROMOTING EUROPEAN UNITY AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE SUCCESS OF PRESIDENT GISCARD IN BRINGING ABOUT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE. "THE COUNCIL'S EXISTENCE," ARGUED BARRE, "ALLOWS US TO FACE THE PROBLEM OF PARLIAMENT AS A MEANS TO BALANCE OUT THE EEC INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK." HE WENT ON TO ASSERT THAT ELECTION BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE WILL NOT MODIFY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S POWERS AS THESE ARE DEFINED BY THE TREATY OF ROME. THUS, THE PM MANAGED TO CONVEY THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH COMMITTED TO THE ELECTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE, INTENDS TO GO ABOUT IT CAUTIOUSLY TO AVOID STRAINS AND DIVISIONS IN THE MAJORITY. INSTITUTIONAL BALANCE AND STRICT APPLICATION OF THE TREATY OF ROME ARE THE TWO PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS THAT IN BARRE'S VIEW SHOULD CARRY THE DAY.

6. TWO INTERNATIONAL VISITORS ATTENDED THE EPERNAY CONFERENCE: THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF LEBANON P. HELOU, AND PRIME MINISTER OF IRAN M. HOVEIDA, WHOSE ASSIDUITY

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IN THE TWO-DAY SESSIONS HELPED ATTENUATE THE SUSPICIONS
OF SOME OF THE MORE IMAGINATIVE FRENCH PARTICIPANTS
WHO SOUGHT ULTERIOR MOTIVES BEHIND HOVEIDA'S WILLINGNESS
TO TAKE TWO DAYS TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE WHOSE INTER-
NATIONAL IMPORTANCE HAS YET TO BE DEMONSTRATED. THIS
IS THE SECOND TIME HOVEIDA ATTENDED A NCS CONFERENCE,
BUT THIS TIME HE WAS THE ONE TO SOLICIT AN INVITATION,
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CAUSING SOME EMBARRASSMENT TO FAURE AND HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE NCS. FAURE NEVER AT A LOSS TO EXPLOIT A SITUATION USED THE PRESENCE OF THE TWO VISITORS TO CLAIM AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION FOR THE NCS. THE SPEECHES OF THE VISITORS MOST APPROPRIATELY ATTRACTED VERY LITTLE INTEREST.

7. COMMENT: THE EPERNAY CONFERENCE MARKED A TURN IN THE NCS ACTIVITIES TOWARDS THE STUDY OF CONCRETE SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND AWAY FROM POLITICS AS SUCH. WHAT MADE THIS POSSIBLE IS THE REALIZATION BY FAURE THAT AGE AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES RULE OUT ANY HOPE FOR HIM OF PLAYING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY THAN THAT ACCORDED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HE HAS APPARENTLY CONCLUDED THAT A SERIOUS EFFORT BY THE NCS TO BECOME AN INFLUENTIAL STUDY GROUP NOT ONLY WILL PROVIDE HIM A REWARDING INTELLECTUAL OUTLET, BUT INDIRECTLY WILL ASSURE HIM OF OPPORTUNITIES TO EXERT AN INFLUENCE WHICH GOES BEYOND THE CEREMONIAL DUTIES OF HIS OFFICE. AS LONG AS HE IS ABLE TO ATTRACT PRIME MINISTERS TO THE NCS CONFERENCES, HE CAN COUNT ON HIS FRIENDS IN THE ASSEMBLY, THE SENATE AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD (BUSINESS AND UNIVERSITIES) TO REMAIN INTERESTED IN THE NCS.

FURTHERMORE, FAURE IS THE GREATEST PRACTITIONER ON THE MAJORITY SIDE OF WHAT GISCARD CALLS "DECRISPATION," I.E., THE REDUCTION OF THE ENDEMIC TENSION AND IDEOLOGICAL ANTAGONISM THAT CHARACTERIZE THE MAJORITY-OPPOSITION RELATIONSHIPS. FAURE TOOK PRIDE IN DECLARING AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE EPERNAY CONFERENCE THAT NONE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES COULD TAKE EXCEPTION TO THE TERMS USED BY THE NCS STUDY GROUPS IN THE FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEMS EACH HAD STUDIED AND THE CONCLUSIONS THEY HAD REACHED. THIS IS NOT A SMALL BOAST IN FRANCE AND NOT TOTALLY UNJUSTIFIED.
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